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# THE QUEST OF THE "*NIHON-TEKI*," OR THE "UNIQUELY JAPANESE "

By YONOSUKE NAKAGAWA

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## 1.

Since the Manchurian affair, there has been a marked growth of State and national consciousness among the Japanese people and the quest of "what is Japanese" has become general in all spheres of our national culture. This tendency has been still further stimulated by the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese conflict. This is not, however, the first time in the history of Japan that the quest for "what is essentially Japanese" in every sphere of the national life has been emphasised. Even after the Meiji Restoration this cry was often raised. But the "essentially Japanese" objective which was sought in the Meiji days does not necessarily possess the same content as our modern quest. This is perhaps only natural, in view of the changing times. Now, it may be admitted that the quest of the "essentially Japanese," as applied to this new age, is being pursued in order to alter the outward semblance of Meiji culture. We live in a period of cultural revolution, cultural confusion and cultural struggle. In order to develop our national life through achieving stability in the prevailing confusion and struggle in the cultural world, it is of paramount importance to arrive at a just understanding of "what is essentially Japanese" in the light of the requirements of this new age and to apply this knowledge correctly.

It is observable that the phrase "what is essentially Japanese" is interpreted in various ways. (1) Some people interpret it as "what prevails in Japan." (2) Others construe it as "what is good for Japan." (3) Some define

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it as "what concerns Japan." (4) It is sometimes taken to mean "what is peculiar to Japan." (5) Some interpret it as the habit of taking the Japanese view of things. (6) Still Others define it, however, as "what accords with the fundamental spirit of Japan."

(1) The first-mentioned definition that "what prevails in Japan" is "Japanese" is open to objection, for, if this definition is to be accepted, many ideas and systems imported from abroad, which are now actually prevalent in this country, will have to be regarded as "Japanese." If so, it would be quite meaningless to attempt to distinguish between "what is Japanese" and "what is foreign." (2) Nor is the second definition much more convincing. If you ask those who insist on this definition to show you what is good for Japan, the answers which you will get will be varied indeed. No Japanese wishes his country ill, of course, but opinion must necessarily differ as to what is good for Japan. (3) The definition that "what concerns Japan" is "Japanese" is not altogether acceptable either. Matters concerning Japan can be viewed from various angles. For instance, they may be viewed from a foreign as well as a Japanese standpoint. Indeed, it has been the fashion in the field of the Japanese social sciences until quite recently to interpret Japanese culture in a Marxian manner. It will inevitably be a foreign not a Japanese culture, which results from the study of society from a foreign point of view, even if the subjects for study are themselves Japanese. It would be absurd to argue that whatever concerns Japan is "Japanese," irrespective of whether it is studied from the Japanese point of view or the foreign, for such a contention entirely disregards the fundamental differences between the Japanese and the foreign points of view. (4) There is better reason for the contention that "what is peculiar to Japan" is "Japanese." The use of the distinctive term "Japanese" assumes an antagonism to or contrast with "what is foreign," and so long as a contrast with "what is foreign" is assumed, it is only natural that attention should be directed to what are peculiarly

Japanese characteristics. However, here again, people do not readily agree as to what are the characteristics peculiar to Japan. As their points of view differ, so must the characteristics of Japan which they conceive vary considerably. In the study of these "characteristics peculiar to Japan," some are naturally attracted by what is superficial or formal. Some will tend to be introspective, others substantial. There are those whose interest is ideological or theoretical, and there are others whose chief concern is practice or activity. The historically-minded student fixes his attention on what is past or present, or what is yet to come. Especially at a time like this when social conditions are undergoing revolutionary changes, different views of life and human society admit of a variety of angles from which to view Japanese characteristics. Such being the case, the simple definition "Japanese" does not give one a clear idea of "what is essentially Japanese"; that unique element of which we are in search. (5) The interpretation that "what is essentially Japanese" indicates a proneness to take the Japanese view of things goes perhaps a little deeper than the foregoing definitions in attempting to grasp the essentially "Japanese" element. For it is, ultimately, the human spirit or its concept which forms the basis of all social phenomena. But, of course, a "Japanese view of things" may be understood in various ways. It may refer to the form of the concept or it may refer to its substance. Some people, for example, may reject western methods of cogitation, while others may be quite ready to adopt them. Again, some may assume that the Shinto or the Buddhist concept of life is characteristically Japanese, regarding the Christian or Jewish outlook as foreign. Society may also be considered from the humanitarian, or the racial, the individualistic, or the co-operative points of view. Thus, the "Japanese view of things" is bound to be interpreted differently by different people. The importance of "taking the Japanese view of things" has been urged in the past. Whenever foreign systems such as Confucianism, Buddhism or Christianity were

imported into this country, the desirability of conceiving them in the Japanese way was emphasised, implying a rejection of the foreign view whatever that might be. Indeed, regard for the Japanese view of things was the keynote of those far-reaching reforms achieved in the past, of which the Taikwa Reform, the Kenbu Restoration and the Meiji Restoration are outstanding examples. Such being the case, it is suggested that this definition too does not make clear the true meaning of "the essentially Japanese" element, which we seek. (6) Lastly, as regards the theory that the adjective "Japanese" means "to be in accord with the fundamental spirit of Japan," it should be pointed out that the advocates of this interpretation regard the spirit of Japan's national polity as synonymous with Japan's fundamental spirit. Nobody will quarrel with the contention that what is based on the spirit of Japan's national polity is "Japanese," and, in this sense, this theory certainly gives more concrete shape to "what is essentially Japanese" than do definitions (4) and (5). It must, however, be remembered that the essence of "what is Japanese," which we seek, is not simply the abstract spirit of the national polity. This spirit has been present in Japan throughout its history of some 3,000 years; it is not an entity peculiar to the present day. If, therefore, the theory is entertained that what accords with the spirit of the national polity is "Japanese," then the distinction at once disappears between what was regarded as "Japanese" in the past and what is regarded as "Japanese" to-day. Moreover, we must not overlook the fact that people hold divergent opinions as to the content of what is regarded as "in accord with the spirit of the national polity."

## 2.

How does it come about, then, that so many different interpretations are placed on the phrase "what is essentially Japanese" to-day? It is presumably due to-day? It is presumably due to the fact that men's view of actualities and

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their concepts of life and society, which underlie this view, are in conflict. A search for theories is always prompted by a concern of some sort, and this concern invariably has some connection with social or individual practice.(Note 1.) I do not deny that there are cases where a theory is sought "for theory's sake," as people often say, but even here, it will be seen, on a broader view, that the research is, in fact, connected with the prevailing trends of social practice, though the party concerned may not be aware of it. There cannot, in fact, be any search for theories which has nothing to do with historical or concrete national or social life. Keeping this point in mind, it may safely be said that those who are trying to elucidate "what is essentially Japanese" are doing so from a practical standpoint of some kind, whether they are aware of it or not. To cite a foreign example, there is now in Germany an active quest for "what is essentially German," or "what is racial." But what is really being sought there is not something that might vaguely be termed "German" or "racial." The underlying motive is the attainment of the practical object of establishing a racial co-operative system.(Note 2.)

Note 1. (a) In explaining the true inwardness of mental phenomena, Dr. Tokuriyu Yamauchi says: "Now, what is it that differentiates mental phenomena from material phenomena, thereby positively defining its essential character?..... Brentano, following the example of the scholastic philosophy of the Middle Age, attributes it to the inward (or mental) immanence of the object. He asserts that it is characteristic of a mental phenomenon to indicate an object of some kind, as having relation to a certain matter. We find that all mental actions contain something within them as their objects. He called this relation 'immanent objectivity.'"<sup>1)</sup>

Note 2. (a) In "Mein Kampf," Hitler says that what the Nazis call "racial" are those "racial" factors that are based on the racial view of the world. The concept of what is "racial," like the word "religious," is so vague that it is open to varied interpretations and, indeed, the term is now often used very loosely.<sup>2)</sup> It is noticeable that all conceivable things, which are vastly different from each other in their aims, readily assume the "racial" cloak nowadays.<sup>3)</sup> (b) Sombart, in his book "Deutscher Sozialismus," studies "what is German." Needless to say, his study is prompted by the practical design to establish "German" Socialism or, according to him, a

1) T. Yamauchi, On Phenomenology. p. 55.

2), 3) A. Hitler, Mein Kampf. S. 7.

Socialism which is intended for Germany exclusively—for present-day Germany, that is. When he mentions as "German" that the country is agricultural, or that it is vulnerable in national defence, or that the nation has the characteristic traits of thoroughness, practicality and independence of mind, or that the nation is spiritual, active and many-sided, he is studying "what is German" as factors in a racial co-operative body.<sup>4)</sup> There is much Nazi literature, besides, which essays to find out "what is German" from the "racial co-operative system" point of view.

From these considerations it follows that there exists a close connection between theory and practice. If so, it is obvious that those who are in quest of "what is essentially Japanese" will have divergent points of view from which they approach their problem.

Now, let me proceed to study the essential character of "what is Japanese" in the light of present-day requirements. As already stated, the study of "what is essentially Japanese" is by no means a new enquiry. Such researches have been undertaken very often in the past, and they will be repeated as frequently in the future. In this sense, it must be said that the quest of "what is Japanese" differs in content according to the age. Some people may take exception to this contention and declare that "what is Japanese" is immutable for all ages, and not subject to change. True, the Spirit of the national polity, which is certainly characteristically Japanese, embodies a fundamental principle which is absolutely immutable, but what we want is not simply the spirit of the national polity as an entity. The question is rather how the spirit of the national polity should be demonstrated in actual practice or what concrete steps the nation should take to manifest this spirit. Our forefathers solved many of the problems of the past in consonance with the spirit of the national polity. The problems which we to-day are called upon to deal with ought to be treated objectively in the light of the prevailing situation. This is too important a matter to be considered subjectively or in a merely whimsical mood. In order to make this point clear,

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4) W. Sombart, *Deutscher Sozialismus*. S. 122—148.



let us consider the "essentially Japanese" features of the Meiji period.

3.

In order to recall the "essentially Japanese" features of the Meiji Restoration, we must first consider the mission which Japan was called upon to fulfil in the situation then prevailing at home and abroad. The Meiji Restoration was a reform which the new developments then taking place in the world at large induced Japan to carry out. It was an age when that tide of individualism and liberalism which had already overwhelmed Europe had begun to lap the shores of Asia. It was an age in which the older structure of a society predominantly European, and based on Roman Catholicism and feudalism, was disintegrating and a new world structure, embracing America and Asia as well as Europe, was taking form, actuated by the twin principles of rationalism and liberalism. The national life of all those countries which had been emancipated from the feudal yoke was then finding a new and freer scope for development. All this pointed unmistakably to a forthcoming remarkable advance in human culture. Such a remarkable turn of events in world affairs was by no means the product of any mere ideology. It was the outcome of the active interplay of material and spiritual forces long dormant within the structure of the feudal system itself. It was a natural and inevitable development in the circumstances. For a country to oppose this current in world affairs would have been to impede its own development; it would have involved ruin and ultimate collapse. Accordingly, the problem immediately confronting Japan was, in the first instance, one of assimilation with this new structure of society and, in the second place of contributing to its successful development. It was for this reason that, in spite of the many proposals to close the country and exclude foreigners which were put forward at the time of the Restoration, Japan

finally adopted the more progressive polity of opening the country discarding the traditional exclusionist policy, in order to place herself more fully in accord with the general trends throughout the world. By thus throwing the country open, Japan at once became part of that new world and found that she could live within that world and be of it. The Meiji Restoration necessarily involved Japan in a new international life. In other words, the true meaning of the term "Japanese" implied in those days not a restoration of Japan to her old ways but a discovery in traditional Japan of those elements which were in accord with world trends while seeking in the outer world features which would assimilate with what was truly "Japanese," in other words the creation and development of an "international Japan." Japan absorbed what was "foreign" so extensively and eagerly in those days that her authorities were charged by many critics with slavish adoption or imitation of things Western, but this was perhaps inevitable in the circumstances in which the country was then placed. I have stated that "what was Japanese" at the time of the Meiji Restoration implied internationalisation, but this does not mean that Japan at once sacrificed her characteristic traits on the altar of a superficial foreignisation. As a matter of fact, the people of the Meiji era may be said to have become ever more deeply imbued with the spirit of Japan in proportion as she became "internationalised." The grand work of the Meiji Restoration was thus achieved without violence to the spirit of the national polity. We are, in fact, justified in going a step further and arguing a new vindication and evolvment of that spirit. At first sight, Meiji culture may appear to involve the Europeanisation or Occidentalisation of Japan, but, in fact, it really signifies a Japonisation of European culture. Liberalism and individualism in Japan, for instance, are not exactly what they are in Western countries. The spirit of the national polity was not affected in the Meiji Restoration any more than in the time of the Taikwa Reform or by the Kenbu Restoration, for it is a great principle

immutable in all ages. Such being the case, the concept of "what was Japanese" in those days cannot be adequately expressed by the mere assertion that the Meiji Restoration was achieved by the spirit of the national polity. We have much to learn from the concept that "what was Japanese" in the Meiji days performed successfully the mission it was called upon to fulfil, in consonance with the spirit of the age and the trends in the world at large. What this principle accomplished then must suggest to the Japanese people to-day the proper attitude which they should adopt in meeting the revolutionary changes which are taking place in the world about them. In the Meiji period, the concept of the "essentially Japanese" rose to the occasion and contributed to world culture in an age of liberal and individualistic revolution. What function, then, must this principle perform in the present day?

4.

Since the outbreak of the "Manchurian affair," there has been a renewed emphasis upon "what is Japanese," but our new objective differs in quality from that of the Meiji period. This is clear from the fact that "what is Japanese" to-day implies criticism of what was accepted as "Japanese" in the Meiji period and may even involve an elimination of older policies. How can we account for this change? Liberalism which ruled the world for a century and a half has been steadily on the decline since the World War. The Communist Revolution in Russia was followed by the Fascist Revolution in Italy. Although these two revolutions were different in character, they were at one in repudiating individualism and liberalism. Thus, Russia and Italy early withdrew from the liberal structure of society. Among other liberal communities, Germany was at the time experimenting with Socialistic liberalism in the form of Social democracy, while Britain, France and America were busily closing the doors to free world commerce and communication by form-

ing powerful blocs to serve their own ends. In this way, the liberal structure of society was partially destroyed, while the remaining portion was transformed into something monopolistic and exclusive. A liberal world community designed for the furtherance of the common interests of all nations through free communication has degenerated into one which is marked by strife and disruption, due to a loss of unity and co-ordination. Japan and Asia could not remain free from the effects of this change in the structure of a world, of which they formed a part. Japan could not afford to remain within this crumbling structure, and found it imperative to find a means of ensuring her own existence. At the same time, she became aware of her new mission of contributing to the reconstruction of a better society. The Manchurian affair was an inevitable corollary. Apart from the immediate circumstances which led to the outbreak of the Manchurian affair itself, we see here, in effect, the inauguration of the task of restoring the stability of Asia — a task undertaken by Japan to promote the reconstruction of the world community at large. That it was an incident of a peculiar kind, and by no means a mere aggressive or Imperialistic war, can easily be judged from the spirit which inspired the foundation of Manchoukuo — a new State which came into being as a sequel to this affair — and from its subsequent development. In Europe, the Nazi Revolution occurred in Germany some time after the Manchurian affair. This Revolution aimed at the establishment of a racial co-operative body through the elimination of individualism and liberalism. The liberal structure of world society was thus further weakened first by the birth of Manchoukuo and then by the *Volte face* of Germany, once a liberal Power. The present remarkable predilection of many peoples to dissociate themselves from anything pertaining to individualism and to search for a national polity founded on a co-operative basis must be regarded as one of the most distinctive alterations that have taken place in history. As already stated, Japan successfully achieved the grand task of bringing

the new state of Manchoukuo into being in pursuit of her further object of organising all Asia into a great co-operative body. Japan can no longer adhere to a narrow conception of egoism or individualism in view of the necessity of aiding in the healthy development of Manchoukuo and of promoting the reconstruction of human society at large. At this very juncture, the present Sino-Japanese conflict developed an affair which is surely destined to prove one of the most significant events in the closing period of individualistic society. The outbreak is ascribable to the policy of hostility and contempt which China foolishly adopted towards Japan in the state of confusion and bewilderment into which she was plunged by the capitalism of Britain and France, who, still remaining within the shattered liberal structure, intensified their economic invasion and extortion; and by Communism which seeks to establish the international proletariat State. In the circumstances, Japan's sacred task of forming Asia into a co-operative unit had to be extended to China. Japan aims at emancipating China from the yoke of capitalism and communism so that she may fulfil her mission as one of the organisers and operators of a new world system. The Sino-Japanese war which is now being fought with this object must, indeed, be described as a sacred war in the strict sense of the term. Individualism and liberalism can no longer be the principles on which Asia should be reconstructed. The reconstruction of Asia will be accomplished only when its peoples fully realise that Asia forms one organic whole and that its component States constitute integral parts of this whole. In other words, all Asiatic States must discard their egoism and form themselves into one whole for the promotion of the general interests of Asia.

As already stated, the liberal structure of the world has undergone a radical change since the World War. That change has been particularly remarkable in Asia, where the old structure is about to undergo complete alteration. This turn in world affairs cannot be explained except on the ground that humanity is moving from individualism to

totalitarianism and from egoism to the principle of co-operation. What, then, is the nature of this "essentially Japanese" element, to be cultivated by Japan, which is playing so important a part in this changing world? Needless to say, it is an element which is required both in reconstructing a new world on the basis of the principle of co-operation and in creating a new Japan in conformity with the requirements of this new world. Only when it is so interpreted will one be able to grasp the objective meaning of the vital cultural phenomenon implied in "what is Japanese." "The unique Japanese element" was eagerly sought in the Meiji period in order to create a new international Japan in consonance with the liberal structure of the world. This "unique Japanese element" which is now being sought is needed for the purpose of creating a new international Japan which will accord with the co-operative structure of the new world now being formed. It is hardly necessary to say that in any age "what is Japanese" is in strict accord with the spirit of the national polity, but we should realize that the objective aspects of this spiritual phenomenon will necessarily tend to vary from age to age. In the Meiji period, we created a State and a national spirit, an international spirit, and a scientific spirit, a liberal spirit and an economic spirit, unknown to previous ages. In this new age of the co-operative system, new spiritual developments must surely be realized. The spiritual element implicit in "what is Japanese" is now needed not only for the establishment of a co-operative community but for the creation of new political, economic and cultural systems. The new age is awaiting the creative function of "what is Japanese" based on the ancient spirit of our national polity.

5.

Lastly, let me say a few words regarding the attitude and methods to be adopted in seeking "what is Japanese." Rationalism, so-called must be excluded in elaborating a

theory of co-operation. A co-operative body does not spring from rational considerations of interest, but develops out of the awakening of the nation to its essential characteristics. Ever since the days of remote antiquity, the Japanese nation has been brought up in an atmosphere of co-operativeness. To fight for the interests of a neighbouring country or to sacrifice self-interest for the sake of the general interest are activities fostered by the national character and traits of the Japanese people. Such deeds are not performed under compulsion from without nor do they arise out of considerations of interest. The natural play of this national character or idiosyncrasy, and not rational considerations of interest, must form the basis of the new co-operative system. Only upon such a basis can co-operative society become permanent and amenable to development. The co-operative community must needs be founded on personality, not on reason. It is an essential condition for the successful establishment of a co-operative body that rationalism, egoism and utilitarianism, principles which ruled in the age of individualism, be abandoned in favour of the true co-operative personality. When people talk of reason, they are often referring to that type of rationalism which, having developed in an individualistic society, inevitably judges all things in an individualistic way. Such reason cannot be a trusted arbiter in a totalitarian society. It would be very dangerous to operate a co-operative community in accordance with the dictates of such an individualistic rationalism. I am sure that true theories governing the new age will be evolved, not by individualistic theorists, but by those who have tasted the bitterness of individualism in the present period of transition that is to say, by those who have become convinced by bitter experience that all things, be they individuals, communities or States, are doomed unless a co-operative society speedily supplants the individualistic society of our immediate past. The practice and theory of such people will, however, be beyond the comprehension of those to whom such modes of thought are alien and who virtually still live in the individualistic

age. The co-operative theory springs from the co-operative personality and the co-operative personality evolves from co-operative experience. The fundamental requisite for the establishment of a co-operative body is that people should be induced to function co-operatively and that they should be assisted to regain their co-operative personality. When it is recalled that our ancestors developed in themselves the essential elements of the Japanese spirit by exorcism, by divine service, by war and by various forms of moral training, and that they handed this unique culture down to posterity, it must at once be clear that reason is not the sole feature in "what is Japanese."

I must further point out that "what is Japanese" does not necessarily exclude "what is foreign." Indeed, it is very necessary that the one should absorb the other. I cannot concur in the attitude of those who carry their antipathy to individualism and liberalism, which they denounce as imported ideas, to the extent of holding everything foreign in abhorrence and contempt. Seeing that the Japanese spirit has been enriched in the past through the absorption of "what is foreign," it is only proper that we should actively import "what is foreign," instead of keeping it at arm's length. A worthy man or nation takes care to derive good from others. Japan, striving to establish a co-operative community in this modern world owes respect the culture of other countries. A co-operative body must stand upon a harmonised culture, for no political or economic co-operative system could endure without spiritual understanding and harmony among the composite elements. Among the causes responsible for the estrangement of feeling between Japan and China since the Meiji Restoration may be mentioned the fact that Japan has turned her back on Chinese classics and culture in her eagerness to absorb Western culture. Consecrated to the cause of righteousness, as she is, Japan must manifest brotherly love for all nations.

I have already described the elements of spirit and personality necessary for establishing a co-operative system



on "what is Japanese" in the light of the present-day requirements. I must now point out the need for the study of actuality by such a "personality." There is no room for doubt that the world is moving away from individualism toward co-operation. If so, the problem of to-day is to discover the concrete forms within which a new co-operative system should be organised. To this end, nothing is more essential than a clear conception of the actualities of the situation. Care must be taken not to be misled by ideological theories into forming a false estimate of actualities. Any co-operative theory evolved without a good knowledge of the actual situation will be of little practical value. Only such theories are genuine which are based on actualities and which are therefore practicable. From this point of view, positivism which was introduced in the Meiji period still deserves to be regarded as a most commendable scientific attitude. There is much more to be said on this subject, but I shall defer a more exhaustive study to a future occasion.

6.

So far, I have studied the various views of "what is essentially Japanese" and attributed a variety of definitions to divergent views of life and society. I have also shown that the world is passing from the individualistic phase to the co-operative and that "what is Japanese" must be sought in the light of this new change in the history of the human community. In other words, I have claimed that "what is Japanese" must be of such a nature that it can contribute to the organisation of Japan as a co-operative community in accord with the new co-operative structure of society. Lastly, I have indicated that the essential spirit of "what is Japanese" should be international in outlook. Again, while emphasising the importance of distinctively "Japanese" practice and of obtaining a clear conception of the actualities, I have concurrently denounced all attempts to exclude "what is foreign," contending that it is rather advisable than other-

wise to absorb these elements. Japan prides herself upon the possession of a unique national polity a principle singularly applicable to the formation of a co-operative community. The most momentous problem set before the Japanese people to-day is how to apply the concept of "what is Japanese" in forming the best type of co-operative body which is, at the same time, itself in harmony with this spirit.